

The not-so-innocent side of mass-produced toys



NOORA SHAMSI BAHAR

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WE don't normally think of toys from a critical perspective because, well, they're just toys. But if one were to reflect on it, one might become easily disenchanted by these children's playthings.

For starters, mass-produced toys are imitation pieces that are basically miniature versions of the real world—"a microcosm of the adult world," as Roland Barthes put it. You have toys in the form of humans wearing miniature versions of clothing, shoes, and accessories. You have miniature doll houses with bedrooms, bathrooms, living rooms, and kitchens. In each of these little imitation spaces are miniature furniture and appliances. There are miniature versions of transportation—cars, bikes, helicopters, aeroplanes, ships, boats, etc. I could go on. But what does this world of imitation do? It enables children to have what's already present in the adult world and they "identify [themselves] as owner, as user, never as creator" (Barthes).

Moreover, this mimicry of the adult world conditions children to conform to societal norms. For instance, children

may develop characteristics driven by gender roles, based on the toys given to them. Action figures of superheroes, a staggering majority of which are male, are given to boys, and that drives home the point that men are supposed to be strong. Then there are imitation pots and pans (the oh-so-familiar *hari patil set*) that every South Asian girl has received as a child, which prepare her to be the homemaker she is meant to be when she grows up. Haven't all Bangladeshi girls enjoyed a bit of *putul khela* (playing dolls), which must have undoubtedly included *putul biye*—pretending that it is the doll's wedding day (sometimes even in the absence of a male doll)? The idea that the most important day of a Bangladeshi girl's life is her wedding day is thus drilled into her at an age when she cannot even comprehend the idea of marriage. And thus, the mirroring of the flawed adult world conditions children so that they can neither think for themselves, nor have their own preferences.

Furthermore, the "goodwill" of toymakers of mass-produced toys is profit-driven. Mattel, American toymaker and creator of Barbie, didn't come up with a doll that promoted inclusivity because that was not the concern in the 50s. However, since 2016, Barbie went through major changes and is currently available in all colours, shapes, hair types, and features. Mattel probably realised that the Americans themselves—let alone the rest of the world—no longer wish to buy the original fair-complexioned



▲ Mass produced toys are a mimicry of the adult world—or what the adults imagine to be right.

PHOTO: CHRIS HARDY/ UNSPLASH

Barbie with her long blonde hair, large blue eyes, baby pink lips, and unrealistic body proportions. Perhaps mothers who were once obsessed with Barbie would think twice before buying Barbie for their daughters, knowing too well that this doll promotes impossible, fantastical body and beauty standards, which in turn lead to low self-esteem issues in its consumers: young, impressionable girls. Did Mattel reinvent Barbie for more sales? A sceptic would think so. And so now you'll see a Black girl asking for the dark-complexioned Barbie with a black afro or a differently-abled girl wanting the Barbie that comes with a wheelchair. The inclusivity of different physical characteristics in the many versions of Barbie is, in my opinion, a business strategy.

Last but not the least, mass-produced toys are not unique. I recently watched a show based on real events, called "Manhunt: Unabomber," and came to understand the psyche of the serial bomber Ted Kaczynski and his anarchist manifesto entitled "Industrial Society and its Future," which projects the ideology that technology is the bane of human existence, because it destroys nature and makes us lead controlled lives (devoid of freedom). Episode 6 showed how Kaczynski made a Kalimba—a small, handheld musical instrument—with his own hands, in his cabin in the woods, which he wanted to present to a bullied boy he had befriended, who had invited him to his birthday party. Before entering the home of this boy, Kaczynski saw him opening a present—a mass-produced miniature/imitation piano, manufactured by a multi-million-dollar industry. The boy was excited over a symbol of the industrial revolution—the very object of Kaczynski's loathing. Shattered, Kaczynski walked away without giving the boy the present he had handcrafted.

Toy keyboards are found in every toy store, and you probably had one presented to you on one of your birthdays, which was trashed sooner or later, because the excitement over it wore out and there was some other "cool" toy to obsess over. If mass-produced toys didn't exist, perhaps kids would value handmade toys and/or find joy in creating their own toys/games from the organic things found in nature—stones, clay, or wood!

50 YEARS OF BD-AUS RELATIONS

A relationship that is strong and enduring



JEREMY BRUER

Jeremy Bruer is the Australian high commissioner to Bangladesh.

ON January 31, 2022, Bangladesh and Australia celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations.

It was on this day 50 years ago that Australia's Foreign Minister Nigel Bowen announced that Australia had recognised the government led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as the government of the new state of Bangladesh. While the announcement was made on January 31, the Australian cabinet made the decision to recognise Bangladesh on January 25.

Australia is proud to count itself as a close friend of Bangladesh. Those of us who have had the privilege to work for Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade are reminded of our close history with Bangladesh and Bengal each time we enter our diplomatic headquarters in Canberra, the RG Casey Building.

As many readers would know, Richard Casey was the governor of Bengal from 1944 to 1946. He also served as Australia's foreign minister and governor general. When he was the governor of Bengal, his secretary was James Lawrence Allen, who was an Australian-born in British India and spoke Bangla and Urdu. On this day 50 years ago, JL Allen became the head of our inaugural diplomatic mission in an independent Bangladesh.

Australia was not a passive bystander to the liberation struggle, and is proud to have been one of the first countries to recognise Bangladesh's independence.

During the liberation struggle, Australia's Prime Minister William McMahon wrote to General Yahya Khan four times, urging a political settlement based upon negotiation with the Awami League and its leaders, particularly Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The fourth letter was written after McMahon's meeting with Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Washington, DC on November 4, 1971.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of our diplomatic relations, we commemorate the long and arduous struggle for Bangladesh's independence. Our thoughts are with all the soldiers, men, women, and children who suffered during the Liberation War.

I would like to remember the contribution of Dutch-Australian William AS Ouderland, who fought in the Liberation War and was the only foreigner to have been awarded the fourth-highest

gallantry award, Bir Pratik, by the Bangladesh government. Ouderland organised and trained the guerrilla fighters of Mukti Bahini and provided them with food, shelter and medicine.

I also acknowledge Dr Geoffrey Davis who, in 1972, at the request of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, travelled to Bangladesh to support hundreds of thousands of Biranganas. This is a stark reminder of the scale of the suffering and the civilian cost of the war.

While we remember the struggle and the fallen, we also take stock of how much has been achieved in these past 50 years and look towards the future.

When Australia recognised Bangladesh and its government led by Bangabandhu, Foreign Minister Bowen noted that "... as a country of 75 million people bordering the Indian Ocean, Bangla Desh (is) likely to play an increasingly important part in the affairs of South and South East Asia." Perhaps it would be fair to say that, like so many people at that time, Bowen might have also underestimated Bangladesh. Over the past 50 years, Bangladesh has demonstrated that its role in international affairs extends well beyond our shared Indo-Pacific region.

Bangladesh is a country with an international outlook. It is a major contributor to international peacekeeping efforts and a key voice for countries vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Bangladesh has also achieved extraordinary, sustained economic growth. Trade between Bangladesh and Australia has grown by 550 percent over the last decade. By 2019-20, our two-way trade in goods and services reached nearly 2.6 billion Australian dollars. We want to see mutually beneficial trade continue to grow as our economies recover from the Covid-19 pandemic.

In September 2021, we signed a new Australia-Bangladesh Trade and Investment Framework Arrangement (TIFA). Under the TIFA, we look forward to exploring how our governments can work together to boost the recovery of the private sector and lead economic growth. We also look forward to welcoming Bangladeshi officials to Australia in February 2022 for the inaugural TIFA joint working group talks, if Covid-19 permits.

On this occasion, I would particularly like to acknowledge the people-to-people links that have made our relationship so strong, warm and enduring. As Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison noted in his message, "With such enormous goodwill between us, I hold much hope for the years ahead."

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Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges
Bridges Division
Bangladesh Bridge Authority
Widening of Road and Construction of Elevated Road from Panchaboti-Mukterpur Bridge Project
Setu Bhaban, Banani, Dhaka-1212
www.bba.gov.bd

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কৃত সেতু পার হব

Ref No. 50.01.0000.856.14.011.21(Part-1)-03

Date: 27 January, 2022

Invitation for Re-Tenders [National] (Physical Services)

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges/Bridges Division.	
2	Agency	Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA).	
3	Procuring entity name	Project Director, Widening of Road and Construction of Elevated Road from Panchaboti-Mukterpur Bridge Project.	
4	Procuring entity district	Dhaka.	
5	Invitation for	Re-Tenders (Physical Services).	
6	Procurement method	Open Tendering Method (OTM).	
7	Source of funds	GoB.	
8	Development partners	Not applicable.	
9	Project name	Widening of Road and Construction of Elevated Road from Panchaboti to Mukterpur Bridge Project.	
10	Tender Package No.	WD3	
11	Tender package name	Engagement of 'Service Provider' for detection of utility services at underground, at grade and overhead along the corridor of "Widening of Road and Construction of Elevated Road from Panchaboti to Mukterpur Bridge Project".	
12	Tender publication date	Date: 30 January, 2022	
13	Tender last selling date & time	Date: 13 February, 2022	Time: 5:00pm (BST)
14	Tender closing date & time	Date: 14 February, 2022	Time: 2:00pm (BST)
15	Tender opening date & time	Date: 14 February, 2022	Time: 3:00pm (BST)
16	Name & address of the office	Accounts Section (6th Floor, Room No. 622), Bangladesh Bridge Authority, Setu Bhaban, New Airport Road, Banani, Dhaka.	
	Place of selling tender document	Office of Project Director, Widening of Road and Construction of Elevated Road from Panchaboti to Mukterpur Bridge Project, Bangladesh Bridge Authority, Room No. 915, Setu Bhaban, Banani, Dhaka.	
	Place of receiving tender		
	Place of opening tender		
17	Date of pre-tender meeting	Pre-tender meeting shall be held on 07 February, 2022; 11:00am.	
	Place of pre-tender meeting	Office of Project Director, Widening of Road and Construction of Elevated Road from Panchaboti to Mukterpur Bridge Project, BBA, Room No. 915, Setu Bhaban, Banani, Dhaka.	
18	Qualification criteria of tenderer	<p>General experience: The minimum number of years of general experience of the tenderer in contracting industries in public sector as prime contractor/sub-contractor/management contractor shall be 5 (five) years.</p> <p>Specific experience: The minimum specific experience as a prime contractor/sub-contractor in providing similar physical services (Data Collection, Survey of underground, at grade and overhead utilities etc.) of a least ONE contract of similar nature (Completed/Substantially completed) over a period of 10 (ten) years each with a value of at least of Tk 75,00,000.00 (seventy-five lac) in govt./semi-govt./autonomous/private organization.</p> <p>Average annual turnover: The required average annual turnover of the tenderer shall be at least of the amount of Tk 3,00,00,000.00 (three crore) over the last 3 (three) years.</p> <p>Liquid assets: The minimum amount of liquid assets i.e. working capital or credit line(s) of the tenderer shall be Tk 70,00,000.00 (seventy lakh Taka).</p>	
19	Description of physical services	Data Collection, Survey of underground, at grade and overhead utilities etc.	
20	Site location	Price of tender document	Tender security
	Narayanganj-Munshiganj	BDT 1500.00 (one thousand five hundred)	BDT 5,00,000.00 (five lakh)
21	Name of official inviting tender	Shafiqul Islam.	
22	Designation of official inviting tender	Project Director, Widening of Road and Construction of Elevated Road from Panchaboti to Mukterpur Bridge Project.	
23	Address of official inviting tender	Bangladesh Bridge Authority, Setu Bhaban, New Airport Road, Banani, Dhaka-1212.	
24	Contact details of official inviting tender	Tel. No. +880-2-55040374, Fax No. +88-02-55040444 E-mail: pdmukterpur@gmail.com	
25	The procuring entity reserves the right to reject all the tenders or annul the tender proceedings.		
<p>Shafiqul Islam Project Director Ph: +88-02-55040374 E-mail: pdmukterpur@gmail.com</p>			
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